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LEGISLATIVE ALERT!

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Dear Senator:

There is a crisis of confidence in American health care coverage. A recent study conducted by the Lewin Group projected that up to 12.5 million more people will lose health care coverage over the next five years if nothing is done to stop the decline. In addition, a majority of Americans believe that insurance plans often compromise the quality of care to cut costs and increase profits. Nearly half say that they or someone they know has had a bad experience with an HMO.

The Patient Bill of Rights Act of 1998 (S. 1890) ensures that every American family has the quality health care they deserve. These rights — the right to a specialist for the care you need, the right to emergency room care, the right to appeal of a health care decision with which you disagree — represent common sense answers to the real life problems experienced by working families across the nation.

With these bills, Congress would extend to the nearly 170 million Americans in private health plans the same protections recently afforded the 90 million beneficiaries of federal health programs by the President's executive memorandum.

The cost of these basic consumer protections are negligible. An independent study by Coopers & Lybrand for the Kaiser Family Foundation puts the costs of the President's Consumer Bill of Rights provisions at \$31 per year for the average family policy. The provisions contained in the PARCA bill (S. 644) add at most \$40 to the average family premium. These translate into premium increases of less than one percent — well below the industry's latest estimate of 15.6% to 30.2%. Those HMOs already doing the right thing will see no cost increase.

Unions are the largest organized group of managed care purchasers and consumers. Together, AFL-CIO unions represent more than *one in four* Americans with employer based coverage. The AFL-CIO and its members applaud the Patient Bill of Rights and stand ready to work with Congress to enact national legislation to protect America's working families this year.

Sincerely,

Peggy Taylor, Director

DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATION